THE QUEBEC SERIES
Four documents written by or in close collaboration with Ross Dowson

Foreword

#1 "The Problem of Quebec"
(from handwritten notes, signed ''R. Dowson, Fall 1945.''
INDEX
British conquest retained feudalism and protected the Catholic Church
Monopolies growth amid petit-bourgeoisie and exploited Québécois
Statistics showing disparity between Canada & Quebec
Artificial Canadian unity and Quebec's right of self-determination
Strong nationalist sentiment bent under reactionary & clerical hegemony
No progressive ends served by the secession of Quebec at this time

#2 "Vive le Québec libre''
(the LSA/LSO convention document adopted July 1, 1968)
INDEX
Introduction
The subordination of the French language
Domination by foreign capital
Behind today's nationalist parties
Québécois workers hold the key to the future
Is separation the answer?
The developing movement for a labor party
The socialist vanguard
Leon Trotsky on the nature of national struggles today

#3 For an Independent and Socialist Quebec
(the LSA/LSO convention document adopted September 1970)
INDEX
Foreword
The developing struggle for *un Québec français*
L'indépendantisme becomes a mass phenomenon
The right of self-determination
A new working class
The petty-bourgeois nature of the Parti Québécois
PQ not responsible to workers
Tasks of socialists
A program for an independent socialist Quebec
The international dimension

#4 "Quebec & the Canada Crisis; for a Constituent Assembly and a new Canadian Constitution"

(from Forward, *1977; re-published June 1991 by* ONDP Left Caucus*, Toronto*

INDEX

The cry for unity
Confederation challenged
An irrepressible conflict
The alienation of the Québécois
The Native people
Federalists floundering
For a Constituent Assembly
For a new constitution

F O R E W O R D by the web editors

This series covers the 32-year period from 1945 to 1977, and begins with Ross Dowson's unpublished notes "**The problem of Quebec."** This article notes the dramatic transformation of the French-Canadian nation from the period of subservience to the dictates of the Catholic Church to the dynamic *indépendantisme* of the swiftly maturing and increasingly urbanized working class in the late 1950s and beyond.

The three documents trace the evolution of this potent nationalism – and its unequalled degree of cultural and geographic cohesion (despite the dispersal and assimilation of almost 50% of the North-American French population into Central and Western Canada, as well as the Eastern and Southern United States).

Little wonder the British conquerors found it necessary to utilize and bolster the authority of the Catholic church over *les habitants*. However, as Dowson sketched in these early notes, the most reactionary elements of French-Canadian nationalism came to the fore as the Québécois petite-bourgeoisie, chafing under monopolies of English-speaking Canadian, U.S. and foreign capitalism as well as the church's restrictive rural philosophy, sought to free up sources of cheap labor and to modernize education and social services, prompting the comprador French Canadian national leaders such as the Duplessis regime to launch campaigns against *les trustards anglais.*

While emphasizing that socialists saw their duty to defend the right of self-determination of the oppressed Quebec nation, Dowson explains that the pan-Canadian revolutionary movement held the view that no progressive ends would be served by the secession of Quebec – but that this collective right had the potential of becoming an agitational slogan in the future within Quebec.

Twenty-three years later, with the adoption of the document **Vive le Québec**

Libre, the rapidly growing League for Socialist Action, which by then had succeeded in launching an autonomous French-speaking sister-organization in Quebec, La Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière, recognized the depth of the transformation of Quebec society through the period of the not-so-‘’Quiet Revolution.’’ By the early 1960s a widespread and utter rejection of the authority of Catholicism and a swift turn towards urban life and the secular development of Quebec’s educational system in the name of national progress was well underway. The traditional Québécois petty-bourgeois nationalism began to sink roots in the working class, whereupon the demand that the French language must become dominant in Quebec’s – above all Montreal’s – workplaces and offices came to the fore.

The 1960s saw a period of strike waves which heralded the end of the Duplessis era. New left intellectual journals and sovereigntist parties sprung up, but garnering only marginal support in the period before the literally explosive period of the terrorist FLQ and the imposition of the War Measures Act by Prime Minister Trudeau. The military occupation of Montreal and the arrest and jailing of most leaders of the nationalist left, as well as the search and harassment of hundreds of citizens by the Canadian Army, helped elevate the cause of *l'indépendantisme* to the status of mass phenomenon and ironically paved the way for the electoral victory of the mainstream Parti Québécois in 1976.

However by the time of the publication of the first pamphlet **’Vive le Québec libre** (1968), when the sovereigntist movement still lacked any real working class support, the LSA while affirming Quebec’s right to self-determination, judged that advocating the separation of Quebec from Canada – at this time – would not advance the cause of the Québécois working class; that the common enemy of the Quebec workers, and of the workers of English Canada, was best fought through the New Democratic Party or in Quebec itself, through the creation of another autonomous labor party developing out of Quebec’s dynamic trade union federations, the QFL and the CNTU. The LSA/LSO estimated that at this time Quebec and English-Canadian workers would best fight together against their common enemy in Ottawa.

This analysis of the LSA/LSO led it to consider further that the creation of a new Quebec labor party (or an autonomous Quebec section of the NDP) would signal an advance to a higher level than that of the English-Canadian NDP because the Quebec labor movement was freer of bureaucratic constraints, partly because it was divided into two major components, the QFL (CLC) and the more militant and nationalist ex-Catholic federation, the CNTU, resulting in the Quebec union leadership more closely reflected the rising militancy of the secondary leadership and rank-and-file. This militancy was fed in large part by the central sovereigntist demand to establish French as the language of work throughout Quebec.

A qualitative leap in mass nationalist consciousness took place however in the next two years, which led the LSO/LSA to re-assess its evaluation of the depth and direction of Québécois *indépendantisme* at its 1970 Convention, adopting a policy document later published as a pamphlet entitled **For an Independent and Socialist Quebec.** The mass entry of the Quebec working class into the movement was

signalled by a militant campaign for French-only schooling for immigrant children, led by the forces for unilingualism, which grew to spearheading the demand that French become the language of work and commerce.

The LSO/LSA responded by re-evaluating its prediction that Quebec and English-Canadian workers would likely unite forming a more militant labor party with ties to the NDP. In the meantime, the Quebec labor federations – along with their ranks – had thrown their support behind the petit-bourgeois-led sovereigntist Parti Québécois. The LSO/LSA saw this as a positive thrust of the Québécois workers into political action, as they by-passed the servile federalist policy of the NDP, warning however that the petit-bourgeois nature of the PQ would lead the struggle for independence down a false and sterile path. The Quebec Trotskyists posed their own program for an independent Quebec, one championing workers control in a socialist economy.

Seven years later in 1977, with the Forward Group's publication of the third pamphlet in this series, **Quebec & The Canada Crisis,** and with the Parti Québécois having recently come to power – the crisis of Confederation was in full evidence. It had become apparent to Ross Dowson and his comrades in the Forward Group that this crisis posed not only the future of Quebec but also – just as sharply – the future of English Canada; that in exercising their right of self-determination, *les indépendantistes québécois* were also putting the rest of Canada on notice regarding the question the future of Confederation itself.

In reality, the election of the Parti Québécois to power itself constituted an exercise in referendum – a vote for a clearly sovereigntist government – for a provincial government but in reality the first genuine declaration of nationhood, based on the will of the Québécois working masses.

The fundamental legitimacy of Canadian Confederation was now challenged, the framework which saw the eclipse of British commercial domination of Canada had faded and was replaced with quickly growing U.S. investment and domination. However this challenge by Quebec also inspired Canadian First Nations to question their subservience by demanding self-rule and by making vast territorial claims that have seriously shaken not only Canadian but also U.S. energy lords.

In the process, Quebec's drive for independence has lifted Canadian nationalist sentiment in English Canada into battle to question not only the erosion of Canada's sovereignty over its natural resources but also its cultural sovereignty and preservation of social programs in the face of globalization and free trade agreements. As can be seen by the record of the left-nationalist Waffle experience in the NDP and of the entire left nationalist movement across Canada, this movement has without exception solidarized with demands for Quebec sovereignty.

Dowson outlines the profound nature of the Québécois struggle for sovereignty; as an ''irrepressible'' force; how even if independence should fail at the first referendum, it will not disappear but continue to gain strength. Likewise the Native

struggles and the broad nationalist sentiment of the Canadian working class will continue to gain strength. This was a prediction of historic scope.

In the first major victory of Quebec in 200 years of struggle, the language bills (Bill 1 and later 101) were passed securing French as the sole language of the courts, the legislature and later in the workplace, in commerce and – most important—in education, governing the cultural direction of immigrants towards francophone society.

Which poses the big question for English Canada. If the Québécois have all but exercised their right to self-determination (there is no more talk of armed intervention, only the ‘’clarity’’ of the question itself and the margin of victory that Parliament requires to entertain the wishes of the majority) – if this question is decided, what is the future of English Canada and how does it relate to the newly independent Quebec?

In short, how will this question be approached and decided? Dowson proposed the fully democratic path of the Constituent Assembly, at that time advocated by forces around a ‘’Committee for a New Constitution.’’ Today, in capitalist Canada, English Canadian workers will want at a minimum to adopt philosophy of the PQ’s predecessor, le Mouvement Souveraineté-association as a starting point as representing its best interests – but who knows what Canada-Quebec relationship would be forged in the process of the Constituent Assembly?

No genuine solution satisfying the national aspirations of the Québécois will be realized without the workers of both nations and their allies forging a socialist Quebec and a socialist Canada.
-- .*The Editors, January 2007*

Postscript

The various journals of the Trotskyist press in Quebec and English Canada in which Ross Dowson played an important role in founding and editing provided some of the first genuine non-Stalinist Marxist analyses of the labor and socialist movements at times in Quebec over this period. These were:

Labor Challenge *(Toronto, 1945-1952), edited by Murray and later Ross Dowson, along with the brief appearance of* La Vérité *in Montreal in the late 1940s edited by Murray Dowson and Jean-Marie Bédard, followed by:*

La Lutte Ouvrière*, published by La Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière in the 1960s – which again introduced a classic Marxist analysis of international as well as domestic events as a partisan of the burgeoning Québécois independentist student and labor movement. In the 1970s the LLO published a widely distributed tabloid:*

Libération *which was initially the only left-wing journal to champion the struggle for French unilingualism, with hundreds of copies sold at mass demonstrations mainly in Montreal.*

The success of this student and labor-led campaign was finally sealed by Bill 101, the landmark legislation of the early days of the Parti Québécois (PQ education minister Camile Laurin the driving force for legislating French-only schools for non-Anglophone immigrants and commercial signage). It's achievement is today evident in the flourishing of French as the language both in the workplace and increasingly among immigrants and Anglophones in Quebec – testifying to it's dynamism and to it's status as one of the world's great languages – alive and well in North America.

SEE ALSO: w13 Journal Subject Indexes – QUEBEC—English Movement Press 1932-1984</i>

Note:
*See in W4 (on-line in Dowson correspondence & Documents)
1969-07July 29: "**Statement to be inserted in the document"** 'Our Organizational Character'" approved by the PC (cross-country Political Committee) in agreement with the Quebec CC (Central Committee) members: the party (LSA/LSO)unites workers of both nations; Quebec struggles inevitably fuse with those of English Canada; Quebec workers have not yet opted for independence.